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In Memoriam

Maj. Gen'l HENRY W. LAWTON

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FUNERAL ORATION

AT OBSEQUIES OF

Major General HENRY W. LAWTON,

U. S. VOLUNTEERS,

BY

PROFESSOR M. WOOLSEY STRYKER,

D. D., LL.D.

CHURCH OF THE COVENANT,

FEBRUARY 9, 1900,

WASHINGTON CITY.

GIBSON BROS.,
PRINTERS AND BOOKBINDERS,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Under the broad seas, and across the land of his love and loyalty, seven weeks gone, the heavy tidings whispered o'er the world's diameter that on the 18th of December, 1899, General HENRY W. LAWTON, of the United States Army, had "given the last full measure of devotion," and under that peremptory shot which was all but the last bolt of the retiring storm, upon the very wave of victory, had fallen, instantly dead. The tears that gullied the cheeks of his brave men, as they lifted their hero's body to a temporary shelter, have been answered by the passionate sympathy and proud recognition of a Republic that is not ungrateful and that remembers, and will remember, those who in its supreme tasks have loved not their own lives.

Over the width of the earth a soldier's household has brought its warrior home. The dust that the nation gathers to its guarding is that of no common man. We are met to celebrate and to mourn him. But while we recall the record so compact with manliness, and which the white blossom of modesty crowns withal, while we recite the story of one who personified the best American traditions, first this day do we regard her sorrow who treads that "solemn aisle of pain" the sanctity of whose shadows are accessible only to her God. And with her, we remember too, for his true sake who begat them, these four dear children—daughters of the army, wards of the people, and son whose best possession shall ever be his father's sword. Orphaned of him indeed his children are, but endowed, too, with the immutable heritage of a gallant name. It is an

estate which with all that appropriately pertains to it this land of pure domestic love will thoughtfully and thankfully administer.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort ; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

Hither we have come—the people’s chosen head, and all authorities else from their high several sessions—to pay our poor but tender alms of love to an unblemished memory, to thank Him, who is our dwelling place in all generations, that the stout tree of liberty still yields such manner of fruitage, and to pledge ourselves, considering the issue of the lives of our renowned dead, to imitate their unblenching and unblighted faith.

Station is secondary, humanity is primary. And whatever else any is, to-day we all are only men and women, brothers and sisters, lifting as children our wet faces toward the consolations of God. The stars of the spangled flag, covering now this shape of its noble warden, shine multiplied upon the dews of grief. But with a solemn joy, it beseems you, his comrades of the Army, to give thanks for the life whose end must (after this parenthesis of difficult farewells) be viewed not as a calamity but as a conquest. “Men unapt to weep” are smitten by the pathos of that courage we commemorate—courage, most touching of all human graces ; but let them also smile with exalted hope as they lay upon this soldier’s sepulchre the chaplets of their homage.

He was born March 17, 1843. Ohio rocked his cradle,

Missouri and Iowa tutored his western spirit, Indiana yielded him to his whole country. A boy of eighteen, April 16, 1861, while scarcely had the acrid smoke drifted northward from Sumter, he gave all he had—himself—to the cause of an indissoluble Union. At once a sergeant, soon a lieutenant, ere long a colonel, he was in the forefront of it all—that brothers' woeful quarrel—until the happy day broke again upon a sacrifice completed and a flag untorn. At Shiloh, at Corinth, through the crimson strife in Tennessee and Georgia, he led and dared. He was medaled for distinguished gallantry; but he won what was more than that—the power even better yet to serve his country. The apprentice of great masters in a workshop where anvil answered hammer of like temper, when it ceased Lawton was a boy no more.

He accepted a lieutenant's commission in the Regular Army in 1867. He was with the Infantry, with the Cavalry, with the Inspector's service. Having fought it out with the insurrectionary tribes for fifteen years, he was the picked man of men to track the Apaches to their last lair and to wrench the southwest from the terror of Geronimo and his band. As another has vividly said, "He hunted them off their feet."

Ten years for him, next, of those accurate and delicate administrative tasks which, in the oxidizing times of peace, alone preserve an army's reality and readiness, years filled also with ardent and close study of the literature of his calling (for he was a prepared man and not an accident), and then the judgment drums of 1898 beat to quarters, the free flag blushed forth and signalled a sister star, the steel throats of the guns were charged with human wrath.

Never recant that year, ye who believe in America's conscience, nor write aught that is unworthy in the volume then begun!

Asking at once for active duty—and what soldierly soul in any way of life does not seek that!—Lawton was major-general of volunteers at El Caney. Here was a man who “couldn’t quit,” and the crest was carried. Then it was his task as its provincial governor to purge Santiago of the varied dirt of centuries, and still he was “only a soldier.”

The last year came. It was January, 1899, when the shores of his fatherland hid behind the Atlantic's rim, and he was climbing over the ridge of the world to his final duty and his appointed end.

“Suns haste to set, that so remoter lights
Beckon the wanderer to his vaster home.”

We all were sure that General Lawton could do it and would; that however Death might throw his heavy dice, this American would stride forward unappalled, purpose shrunken snug upon deed and tight as the steel jackets of the cannon. And he did it. His men were worn barefooted in the persistent rush, but cheerfully they pushed along—the rapid leading making a resistless following—until they were pounding the very back of that insurrection, of which, after all, Aguinaldo was but the local lieutenant. Lawton smote and overcame. The jungles were no obstacles, the mountains were stairs. He had won Santa Cruz, San Rafael, San Isidro, San Mateo, and there on the very day that his commission as Brigadier of Regulars had been engrossed his campaigning ended, he received a better promotion. Upon the field he was knighted by the accolade “of that Captain under whose colors he had fought so long,” and

his soul was redeemed in peace from the battle. Alas and Amen !

“ What matters how or on what ground
The freed soul its Creator found.”

Long has the way been ; but at last his native land receives to her bosom all of him that could die, and with *Ave et Vale* takes his fame to her brow and his memory to her heart. Arlington, where armies sleep, opens her gates to the ashes that claim her keeping, which He who cradles the years shall guard well until “ the reveille of the breaking morn.” Sound, bugles, your mournful last call ! Carry the echoes, ye million-tongued couriers of the air !

“ And for his passage
The soldier’s music and the rites of wars speak loudly for him ! ”

Here the pall, the dead march, the committal and the volley ; but there the squadrons of light, the ranks of the white-clad army of martyrs, the peal of golden bells and the acclaim “ Well done ! ” Blessed and triumphant doom of the faithful servant !

“ No soldier on service entangleth himself with the affairs of this life,” and—“ tide life, tide death ”—this veteran of three wars was one who served not only “ with a soldier’s eye,” but with an unrelenting will. The muscular hand of his resolution wrought out the plan of his intelligence and “ thought death no hazard in this enterprise.” No primrose path of dalliance ever allured his feet. No petty defects quarreled with his unalterable and intrepid fidelity.

“ He could not frame a word unfit,
An act unworthy to be done.”

And as to-day we listen to the surf-beats of that eternity,

under whose rote pageantry tarnishes and language is benumbed, we know again that

“ Wars must make examples out of their best.”

This better Plantagenet, this latest Bayard “without fear and without reproach,” this modern Philip Sidney, whose life also was “poetry put into action,” has shown once more of what a stuff is incorrigible manhood—in what substance root the memories that last.

For a true poet (and so proven) is one who has written at least some things of which no poet that ever lived could have been ashamed, would gladly have owned; and a true man is admitted to the fellowship of heroes by the equality and peerage of his supreme deeds. Here was one whom Raleigh, Gustavus Adolphus, William of Orange, Winkelried, Cambronne, Garibaldi, would know at sight. He was of that time-enduring breed which has made Agincourt and Naseby and Quebec and Lucknow of immortal story. He was comrade to the Marylanders who guarded the retreat at Long Island, to the men who passed the Delaware, who served the guns of Pleasanton, who soaked the sod of the Peach Orchard, who ran singing through the tide at Manila, who held Guantano. The soul was in him of those who did business in great waters with Paul Jones and Lawrence and Truxton and Worden and Bagley—of all the line who yet are with us and which shall not be diminished though all the seas run red. He was in the spiritual loins of Joseph Warren and of Herkimer. He knew the secret and has saluted the souls of Mansfield and Sedgwick and Reynolds and McPherson and Phil. Kearney and Custer!

Let it be said, and let it be said here, that none of us is of those who walk backward into the future and translate the present upside down! A tumid and carping pessimism lives only in the pluperfect, but good faith lives in the future perfect. The one is subjunctive, the other is indicative. Nay, duty is in the imperative and unconditional mood! Great and embattled evils make resistance indispensable, and such resistance in the extreme event is war. Calamity war ever is; but there are worse calamities; for not pain, not cost, is a final criterion against what is best.

When, in the name of mankind, and that peace might be real, we undertook in 1898 to cleanse the seas, we affirmed a principle and made a precedent that I, for one, hold to have written the most honorable leaf in all our history. But all that has been since was corollary to that. No special pleading of professional malcontents with whom wisdom will not die, no *a priori* abstraction, can unsay what this dead soldier's zeal said for America. Rather does such a death enjoin upon our purpose and performance such ends as shall vindicate us from cowardly indifferentism and evasion in the face of whatever duty, and however unexpected or complex, enjoin us to regard and to teach liberty's authority.

We do not welcome war, we deplore it; but more deplorable were a craven vacillation toward a riddle which must have room for its solution. For that room's sake, and for the peace it shall secure at last, we reverently invoke upon our arms the favor of the Lord of Hosts! and though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil. "In the name of our God will we set up our banners."

The Arch-Leader of the migrations of men, the Counsellor "whose ways are higher than our ways" summons us to an imperial participation in the affairs of the round world—not for conquest and commerce sake, but for Christ's, who is "the resurrection and the life" for peoples too. He summons us from an isolated even though a continental selfishness, like that in which the palaces of self-contented Babylon became the abode of owls and satyrs—summons us, though we may not yet know the half of it, and though our thoughts are not His thoughts, to minister, as the missionaries of the perfect law of liberty, toward the pacification of the globe, and unto the coronation of that Blessed and Only Potentate, "having neither beginning of days nor end of years," who in righteousness judges and makes war, and who is the Prince of Life.

New meridians of relation, new zones of authority, new horizons of duty,—these with all their concomitant responsibilities; but also with the assurance that He who lades the burden will strengthen the back,—that

"Only the Master shall praise us
And only the Master shall blame."

Our faith, too, must needs be militant, dauntless, ready to die if need were, or else we are unworthy to touch the hem of this pall, which rather let us, in remembrance of one who fought our fight, press to our lips with kisses that are covenants—covenants that we henceforth will stand, as those that are "baptized for the dead," to advance our country's true cause, to purify and to exalt it.

In some good day—not far away, please God—when those islands, foundlings no longer, shall have been rendered as a majestic deodand to civilization, to regulated freedom,

and to the God of these, there in fair Luzon, right where he fell, front to his duty, let the valiant frame of this true liberator rise in immutable bronze, while, understanding us at last, our brown brothers, gazing upon that statue, stature, statute, all in one, shall say—"He was America's ; but he is ours too—LAWTON ! He was slain by us ignorantly in unbelief ; but he has forgiven."

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